

Movement: Removing Congestion

And we, who with unveiling faces, all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

~ The Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV

Clarity → Movement → Alignment → Focus

Congestion is very frustrating.

It does not take empirical research to validate the casual observation that people hate rush-hour traffic. You can see it on their faces. You can see it on the gripped steering wheels. You can see it by the certain hand motions offered to other drivers.

Congestion during rush hour is painful. The flow of traffic is stopped. People creep along at a snail's pace. The roads were not designed to handle that many people at one time. There is nowhere for all the cars to go. So everyone sits and waits.

Head or chest congestion is also a nuisance. You can see it on the somber faces of those struggling to breathe. When you have congestion, your day seems longer than normal. Your head or chest hurts. You don't feel like talking because you sound funny.

Congestion in the head or chest prevents movement. The movement of air is hampered because of congestion. Your head or chest is full of stuff that is not supposed to be there. Mucus, phlegm, and junk clog your body. The extra stuff prevents your sinuses from functioning properly.

Congestion stinks.

Many churches are congested.

Spiritual movement is stifled. The building of lives is slowed. And these congested churches are filled with the same people. We are not referring to the absence of new people, although that is telling as well. We are referring to people staying the same. Unchanged. Unmoved.

We are talking about people not being transformed. Week after week, year after year, many people are the same. The building project of people's lives is stalled. Stagnant believers and congested churches go hand in hand.

Sadly, in many churches people are stuck in the same place spiritually. And there is no intentional process to move them.

The Bible paints a different picture of spiritual growth. According to Scripture a believer's life is to be transformed more and more. People are not supposed to be the same. There is to be progression, movement.

Our churches should be filled with people who are becoming. Becoming more like Christ. Becoming more loving and joyful. Becoming. Being transformed.

Unveiled Faces

Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (NIV).

Paul is taking the readers back to Moses. Moses would walk up to this mountain called Mount Sinai. There he would meet with God face-to-face. It was the place where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Each time Moses went to meet with God on this mountain, he came back glowing.

He had an encounter with God on Mount Sinai, and this encounter was so remarkable that Moses was transformed. His appearance was altered. He shone. He looked different. The first time he came down from the mountain, people were even afraid. The change was that significant.

Moses would wear a veil over his face when he came down from the mountain. He wore a veil to cover the fading glory (2 Cor. 3:13). Once Moses left the presence of God, the glory would fade. With each step away from the mountain, the glory would decrease.

*Moses had a veiled face. We have *unveiled* faces.*

*We do not have to wear a veil because the glory is not diminishing. In fact the opposite is true. The glory is ever *increasing*. It is so because we never leave the presence of God. We never come back down the mountain.*

The mountain is in us.

His Spirit lives within us. We have a relationship with God that even Moses did not have. We are in the new covenant that brings righteousness, not the old covenant that brings death (2 Cor. 3:9). Moses had to go to the mountain to behold the glory of God. We don't. We have a greater level of intimacy.

*Just as God transformed Moses, He transforms us when we place ourselves in His presence. The word for *transform* is in the passive voice and present tense. The passive voice indicates that we do not transform ourselves. God is the one who does the transforming.*

The present tense indicates that this transforming is currently taking place. Right now. As you read this. Transformation is not only a past event. God is also about right now.

*The word from transformation is *metamorphosis*. It means to change the essential nature of something. It is a real change, not just a change on the outside. The core of something is changed. The word is used to describe the process a caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. The nasty, wormy, creepy, crawly insect becomes a beautiful butterfly. The process is metamorphosis.*

God desires to bring His people through this morphing process. He seeks to transform the people in Your church into His image. And He wants to do so with ever-increasing glory. Meaning He wants the people you serve to be more like Him tomorrow than they are today.

Congested churches and stagnant believers are the antithesis of God's plan.

Since God is the one who transforms the people in your church, what is your part?

Your Part

What did Moses do to be transformed? What was his part?

Think about it. God did the transforming, but Moses played a vital role in the process. What was his part? What is your part?

Moses walked up the mountain. Moses placed himself in the right place to be transformed by God. He discovered the place where God would move in his life, and he put himself there.

Church leaders must do the same. Your part as a church leader is to place people in the pathway of God's transforming power. Your part is to design a process that partners with the transformation process revealed in Scripture.

Simple church leaders have done just this. They have designed a ministry process that puts people in the place for God to transform them. The ministry process is not where the power lies. Only God does the transforming.

However, God has designed spiritual growth to be a process. It is to occur with ever-increasing glory. And simple church leaders have chosen to partner with God in this process.

Simple church leaders have designed their simple process with movement in mind. The ministry process moves people to greater levels of commitment—with ever-increasing levels of discipleship. The simple process moves people through the process of spiritual transformation.

Congestion is gone.

Movement occurs naturally. People are not stuck in the same place. There is a plan for transformation. People are challenged to progress through the simple process. Change in the lives of people is expected.

*According to our research, there is a significant relationship between the vitality of a local church and the movement of the church's ministry process. Movement is *the sequential steps in the process that causes people to move to greater areas of commitment.**

Do you have a simple process that moves people? Or is your church body full of congestion?

Thankfully for the sake of your head or chest, there is medicine designed to unclog your sinuses. There is medication prescribed to bring the movement of air back to your sinus system. Likewise in this chapter you will be given five prescriptions to unclog your process, to remove the congestion.

All five prescriptions are essential and have been validated by our research.

If you want your process to move people, your programming must be strategic and sequential. You must also intentionally move people, offer a clear next step, and provide a class for new members.

1. Strategic Programming

According to our research, strategic programming is extremely important.

We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders if they have intentionally placed programs to work in conjunction with their ministry process. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "We have placed our programs along our strategic process" (Figure 1).

Of the vibrant churches, 54 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement compared to 30 percent of the comparison churches. The vibrant churches were much more likely to place their weekly programs along their simple process.

Simple church leaders are strategic with their programming. They abhor the concept of doing programs because of tradition or the need to have something on the calendar. They view programs as tools to place people in the pathway of God's morphing.

Northpoint Community Church has strategically placed steps along their simple process. They began with their process and placed appropriate steps/programs accordingly. Each program is designed to move people from the foyer to the kitchen. Several lessons on how to program strategically can be learned from Northpoint and other simple churches. Following are a few of the lessons we have observed.

Figure 1. Respondents' level of agreement with item programming along process

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Begin with your clearly defined process. *Placing your programs along your process is an extension of the clarity element. It is matching your programs with the simple process God has given your church.*

However, you must begin with the process, not the programs. If you begin with the programs, you will have a tendency to build a process around the programs. If the programs do not fit into your process, you need to eliminate them. You will find more on this issue in chapter 8.

Choose one program for each phase of your process. *For each department in your church, there should be one program for each phase of your process. The temptation is to attach all of your existing programs to one aspect of your process. While the intentions are good, doing so will not simplify your ministry. Multiple programs for each phase of the process divide attention and energy.*

Design each program for a specific aspect of the process. After you have chosen one program for each phase of the process, be sure that program effectively engages people in that aspect of the process.

Each program should be distinct from the others. The program fulfills a different phase of the process and must have a unique identity. Do not let other priorities clutter the purpose of the program. Protect it. Each program is a critical part of the overall picture. Be sure that program is done with excellence. Constantly evaluate it. Constantly tweak it.

Place the programs in sequential order. Speaking of movement, we are now at a perfect place to move to the next prescription: sequential programming.

2. Sequential Programming

Programs must be placed along your ministry process, and they also must be placed in sequential order. According to our research, sequential programming is vital.

We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders if their programs are offered in sequence. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "Our programs are sequential, based on our process" (Figure 2).

Of the vibrant churches, 37 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 15 percent of the comparison churches. The vibrant churches are more than twice as likely as the comparison churches to set up their programs sequentially.

Figure 2. Respondents' level of agreement with sequential programming

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Back to Rafting

Let's go back to the Ocoee. You know, the river where Tripp is our tour guide.

The white-water rafting trip on the Ocoee follows a simple process. The designers of the rafting expedition sequentially designed the experience. There is wisdom in the sequential ordering of the rafting journey.

For example, the journey begins on a slower part of the river. The designers don't throw you in at an advanced level. They place the rafts in the river at a location where you will experience greater rapids the longer you are on the river. You begin with a level one rapid and work your way up, with ever-increasing glory.

The photographer is even placed at a strategic place along the journey. Your picture is taken as you are battling the strongest rapid of the day. You can bring home an enlarged photograph to show your friends how brave you are.

Here is how the sequential process of the rafting experience unfolds:

First, you get connected to the concept of rafting. The experience does not begin with a jump in the river. The trip does not begin with taking on a level four rapid. It begins with an orientation, selection of the appropriate gear, and meeting your tour guide. You put on the gear and board the bus. You see the river and hear stories about it. You are now along for the ride. You have agreed to go on the journey.

Second, you get to know the people in your raft. You share stories with other people in your raft. You need each person. You could not paddle the river alone. The tour guide stresses that safety depends on teamwork. And the people make the journey exciting. Part of the experience is hearing the shouts from the people in your boat.

Third, you become a contributor. At first, the tour guide does most of the work. However, as the journey progresses, the rapids get stronger. And he needs everyone in the boat to paddle. You get to help. Your two strokes forward or three strokes backward make a difference.

You go home telling the story. You call families and friends from your cell phone, once you are back in service range. Which, if you have a certain cellular company, may not happen for a long time. Regardless, you have pictures and memories, and you desire to bring others with you on the journey.

If the rafting journey were not designed with sequence, it would be a horrible experience. Imagine if you were tossed to a level four rapid without knowing the people in your boat or without having your gear. Imagine being placed in the middle of the river without knowing your tour guide or how to row.

Without proper sequence the experience would not be meaningful to you. It would be a miserable day. You might even bail out before the journey is complete. You would not develop a love for white-water rafting or the people in the boat. You would leave with no desire to bring others through the experience you endured.

The designers of the experience strategically place the events of the day to happen in logical sequence. By doing so, they enable rafters to progress through the day with joy. Rafters are able to move through the journey with confidence because they are prepared for each upcoming challenge.

Sequence produces movement.

Likewise, sequential programming produces movement.

Simple church leaders have learned the wisdom of sequential programming. By placing the programs in sequence along the process, the programs truly become tools to facilitate the process of transformation. Congestion is conquered. People move through the process simply by moving to the next level of programming.

As you sequentially place programs along your ministry process, here are three essentials to guide your thinking.

Order the sequence of your programs to reflect your process. In other words, the order of the programming must flow from the order of the process. For example, the order of Cross Church's process is love God, love others, and serve the world. The sequence of their programming reflects this process.

The first program in Cross Church's sequence is their weekend worship services (love God). The next level of programming at Cross Church is their small-group program (love others). The final level of programming is their ministry team structure (serve the world).

At Cross Church, it would be confusing if the first program in the sequential process were their small-group program. It would not match their stated process. Their stated process begins with "love God." The program they have matched with that aspect of their process is their weekend services. Therefore, the first program in their sequence must be the weekend worship services.

This issue is not a small detail. The sequence matters because you want people to move through the simple ministry process. If you place the programs sequentially, people will move through your process simply by moving from one program to the next. As people are progressing through the programming, they will be simultaneously moving through the process that God has given your church.

Designate a clear entry-point to your process. The entry-point is the first level of programming in your simple process. Without a clear entry point, there is no beginning to the process. When a process lacks a clear beginning, it is definitely not simple.

The entry point is the program through which people are most likely to enter your church. It is the weekly program that guests are most likely to attend. It is the program you encourage your people to invite friends to attend.

Once you have designated a clear entry point to your process, treat your program that way. Do it with excellence. Know that new people will form an impression of God and your church based on what they see and hear.

Identify the next levels of programming. Just as you have designated an entry point, identify the next levels of programming in your process. What program do you desire people to attend after they have been to your entry-point program? What is the program you want them to attend after that?

The commitment should increase with each level of programming. Therefore, attendance at the subsequent levels of programming will decrease as commitment increases. That is not a bad thing. It is clarifying the levels of commitment in your church. Everyone is at different places in the journey. Each person is a work in progress.

Once you have placed your programs strategically and sequentially along your process, the real challenge begins. Strategic and sequential programming is vital, but that can all be done on paper. It does not involve real people. The challenge is moving people through the process. The challenge is making it happen. This is the essence of intentional movement.

3. Intentional Movement

Johnny Lechner is finally moving on. Actually the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater is forcing him to graduate. He has been there too long. He is targeted to receive his diploma in May. You probably know someone who squeezed a four-year degree into five or six years, but he has gone well beyond that.

Lechner has been in college for twelve years.

That's right—twelve years. He is almost thirty. This entire time he has been working on his bachelor's degree. He has been allowed to be in matriculation purgatory for three times the length of an average collegian.

Lechner still dresses like a college student or poster child from Abercrombie and Fitch. He still goes to college parties. In fact, one of his major goals for his final year was to go on two spring break trips. He is such an overachiever. He even ran for a position on student government with the platform of his collegiate experience.

On late-night talk shows, Lechner says that he likes college. Just in case you were unsure. He enjoys the carefree lifestyle and the avoidance of real-world responsibilities. He likes sleeping late, playing some music, going to a couple of classes, and then hanging out with friends. Staying in the same place is comfortable for him. College has become a perpetual comfort zone for Lechner.

While many think his situation is ridiculous, are not many churches structured the same way? In these churches, people remain in the same place spiritually for years. And sometimes they remain in the same groups. They are kept in some type of spiritual holding tank. They rarely move to greater levels of commitment.

They are in a perpetual comfort zone.

Simple churches fight the Lechner syndrome. They resist congestion. They intentionally move people from program to program through their ministry process.

According to our research, intentionally moving people through your ministry process is vital. We asked vibrant and comparison churches if they use their programming to do so. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "We are intentional about moving people from one program to another" (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Respondents' level of agreement with intentional movement

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Of the vibrant churches, 37 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 15 percent of the comparison churches. Vibrant churches are more than twice as likely as comparison churches to move people from program to program.

Remember, simple church leaders are designers. They design opportunities for people to be transformed. Complex church leaders are programmers. Programmers focus on one program at a time. Designers focus on the movement between the programs.

Without movement, programs are an end to themselves. Without movement you are just running ministry programs. To maximize movement in your church, consider the following four suggestions.

Create Short-term Steps

As you seek to move people from one program to another, think in terms of short-term steps. How can you help people make steps toward the next program in your process?

The steps should not be new programs. They should be short-term opportunities that expose people to an aspect of the process that they have not yet experienced.

Saddleback Church has been a pioneer of short-term steps. The process at Saddleback seeks to move people from worship services to small groups. To help people make that step, Saddleback occasionally offers short-term groups that are promoted in conjunction with the worship services.

Saddleback, led by Rick Warren, was the first church to launch forty-day spiritual growth campaigns. During these campaigns Saddleback aligns all of the teaching in the church around the same theme. For six weeks the small groups engage curriculum that relates to the messages delivered in the worship services.

All of the people are then challenged to join a small group for just six weeks. It is a short-term step. People who have not yet moved to a small group are receptive to this six-week challenge. They know that their commitment has a predetermined amount of time to it; therefore, they are more willing to give it a try.

While they receive the content of the series, they also move farther along in the spiritual transformation process. Many of the groups continue to meet after the series is finished.

At Christ Fellowship in Miami (Eric's church), the process is designed to move people from worship service to small groups and then to ministry. To help move people from the small group to the ministry aspect of the process, all groups were recently challenged to serve together beyond the walls of the church. It was a short-term challenge. Groups participated in one serving-beyond opportunity over a two-month period. Many people were exposed for the first time to the serving part of the process.

Capitalize on Relationships

People do not progress through the simple process because they hear it from the pulpit. People do not move through the process because they see a purpose statement on the wall. As helpful as these things can be, people move because someone else brings them through the process.

Relationships bridge the process.

*Since relationships are so vital, set up relational connections between the programs. Remember, it is the handoffs that count. Movement is what happens in between the programs. Movement is *how* someone is handed off from one program to another.*

Here is an example. Linda is a thirty-two-year-old mom who is attending worship services. Her husband only comes with her occasionally. She is a believer and recently has sensed a hunger to grow deeper in her faith. While she attends fairly regularly, she does not have deep relationships at the church. The people she does know well are only as involved as she is. Or less.

She has heard that there is a small group for young mothers at her church. Her church desires to move people from worship services to small groups. They are designing these groups with people like Linda in mind.

Here are two approaches to getting her into a small group.

Approach 1: *The church puts a list of small groups in the worship folder. Linda hears a challenge from the stage to come to one of these groups. The times are listed along with the rooms or homes where the groups are located. She knows no one at the group. She is not even sure where the street is located. She is afraid if she does not like it, she will feel awkward or guilty not returning.*

Approach 2: *The church puts the same list in the worship folder, but they do more. They have a small-group registration booth where leaders of the groups meet people and answer questions. Linda can go to the registration booth and meet the leader of the young mother's group. While she is at the booth, she meets other women who are inquiring about the group. The relationships alleviate her fears.*

The second approach contains a small difference that makes a big impact. The difference is relational. Relationships, not information, bridge the process. Capitalize on the power of relationships.

Consider the "Now What?"

No matter where a person is, God is seeking to bring him or her farther on the spiritual journey. Christ meets people where they are, but He keeps pulling them farther along. Transformation is His work. And He is never finished.

Your programming should be an expression of how you believe God works in the lives of people. As you are seeking to move people through your process, always consider the "now what?" Do not let the present program be the end. Seek to move people farther along.

Practically, it means encouraging people at the present level of programming to move to the next level. View the present program as a bridge to the next program in the process.

During our consultation at Cross Church, we noticed the senior pastor referred to his small group during his sermon. The message was clear: "This worship service is not the end. There is something else for you. And for me." It was not a point in his message. The comment was simply woven into the fabric of his message. And his church. At the conclusion of the service, announcements were made regarding small groups. Cross Church nailed the "now what?".

Connect People to Groups

Groups are set up differently, and they have a variety of names: Sunday school, small groups, Bible fellowship classes, community groups, ministry teams, cell groups, home groups, and bowling leagues. OK, we are joking about the bowling league. But you get the point. Groups are offered in a variety of ways.

While the purpose and style of each group varies, they all connect people relationally. As you are seeking to move people, move them to some type of group.

Thom's previous research on effective churches is convincing. What he said several years ago still rings true: "The picture is clear: people stick to a church when they get involved in a small group."¹

If people only come to a service, they can drop out without anyone knowing. When people move to a group, they are known. They are able to live life with other people. They enjoy the ride with other people in the raft.

When people move to a group, they stick. They stay. They last. They have a support network, a community of fellow Christ followers. They continue in the life of the church. They are still being transformed.

Strategic programming, sequential programming, and intentional movement are essential prescriptions for removing congestion in the body of Christ. They are broad and are directly related to the programming involved in a simple process. The next two prescriptions are specific steps that reveal a church's commitment to movement.

4. Clear Next Step

Stories of orphans in countries like Romania and Russia have grabbed the hearts of many Americans. Children are placed in large orphanages with hundreds of other children. The number of caretakers in each orphanage is extremely low. The ratio of adults to children is shocking.

All the caretaker can do is be sure each child has his or her basic needs met. Food, water, shelter. However, the children are not touched. They are not hugged. They are not nurtured.

A decade ago journalists first entered these orphanages. They were shocked at what they did not see or hear. There was no laughter. No tears. Three-year-olds could not speak or cry.

Without touch the orphanages were void of laughter and tears. Without touch the children's growth was stunted. Without nurture, they did not mature normally. The lack of attention was damaging to the children.

Unfortunately, many churches treat new believers like these orphanages treat children. There is little attention and nurture. New believers are tossed aside. There is typically no follow-up. The person is unsure what to do next.

This situation is tragic. Just as children need nurture and attention during their formative years, so do new believers. There must be a clear next step for them. They must be moved into the life of the church. They must be nurtured toward spiritual growth.

According to our research, offering a clear next step for new believers is essential. We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders about their treatment of new believers. We asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "After someone becomes a believer, the next step for them in the spiritual transformation process is clear."

Of the vibrant churches, 48 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 22 percent of the nongrowing churches. The vibrant churches are more than twice as likely as the comparison churches to offer a clear next step to new believers (Figure 4).

It makes sense that vibrant churches are more careful in their treatment of new believers than comparison churches. New believers are often the most vocal missionaries a church has. They still know lost people. They have a fire in them that many older believers lose. New believers have not learned all the religious rules yet. They talk freely about the grace they have discovered.

New believers are the greatest resource your church has to influence the community. When vibrant churches nurture new believers, they are nurturing the movement of the gospel.

While nurturing new believers produces fruit, it is also the right thing to do, whether it produces any result or not. These new believers are real people. They are not just names on a list. They have real lives, jobs, and families. They have just crossed the line of faith into a new world. They are as new to this world as a baby is to his new surroundings. They need someone to walk with them in this new world. They need a clear next step.

Figure 4. Respondents' level of agreement with providing a clear next step

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

A Look at the Next Step

Many of the simple and vibrant churches we researched use some type of group for new believers. They either provide a group for new believers, or they match individuals up with an existing group. Regardless of the approach, plugging new believers into a group is effective. Thom discovered in a previous study that "new Christians who immediately became active in a small group are five times more likely to remain in the church five years later than those who were active in worship services alone."¹²

Other simple churches we researched provided new believers with a personal mentor or discipleship leader. The two people meet for several weeks in an informal setting to go through some type of curriculum. Or the mentor simply helps the new Christian get plugged into the life of the church.

Whatever your strategy is with new believers, have a strategy! Discipleship of new believers does not just happen. It must be intentional. There must be a heartbeat and a plan to make it happen.

Simple churches move new believers into the life of the church. They also are purposeful in their treatment of new members.

5. New Members Class

There is an orientation for almost everything these days. If you move into a new neighborhood that has a homeowners association, you will probably be invited to a new residents meeting. If your child heads to college this fall, you will send him or her to a new student orientation—not covered in the tuition. For new drivers there is a class.

Eric recently thought about exchanging his reading glasses for contacts. Then he was told he would need to attend an orientation on how to "install" them properly. He is still using the glasses. Who has time for a class on contact lenses? Eric's doctor will not allow him to get contacts. His commitment is too low.

There is an orientation for almost everything these days. Except for joining many churches.

It seems that the commitment to buy contact lenses is greater than the commitment to join many churches. Most churches only require new members to fill out a card or a triplicate form. It happens so fast. Expectations are minimal. Signing up for a department store credit card takes more time.

Simple churches, however, tend to require new members classes.

According to our research, it is critical that you use some type of new member training to move new people effectively into the life of the church. We asked vibrant and comparison church leaders to state their level of agreement with the following statement: "We have a class or group to move new people into the life of the church" (Figure 5).

Of the vibrant churches, 70 percent strongly agreed or agreed with this statement compared to 38 percent of the comparison churches. The vibrant churches are much more likely than the comparison churches to offer a new members class.

Thom has commented numerous times on the importance of a new members class. After studying churches that effectively reach the unchurched, he stated, "The relationship between assimilation effectiveness and a new members class is amazing. Churches that require potential members to attend a new members class have a much higher retention rate than those who do not."³

The impact is amazing. So we are not surprised that vibrant churches use new members classes to move people into the life of the church. It just confirms what has already been established.

However, we are surprised that so many churches still do not offer any type of new member training. The evidence is and has been compelling. Offer a class for new members!

Figure 5. Respondents' level of agreement with new members class

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Typically at new members groups or classes, the beliefs, practices, and direction of the church are discussed. People get a chance to understand exactly what they are joining. They hear the heartbeat of your church. Great dialogue occurs, and people walk away with a deeper connection to your church.

In addition, we have observed that simple church leaders use their new member training to teach their process and ask for commitment. We encourage you to include both of these in your new member orientation.

Teach the simple process. *People enter churches with various kinds of backgrounds and experiences. Some people join with a preconceived idea of how a church should operate. Some even come with strong feelings about programs they believe the church should offer.*

The new members class can serve as a filter for ministry philosophy at your church. It is a great opportunity to teach the simple process that God has given your church. People are given an opportunity to know up front how your church functions.

Ask for commitment to the process. *The new member training is the only time church leaders have exclusively with potential members. Simple church leaders maximize this time by asking for commitment. They clearly define how a member can progress through the process of spiritual transformation. They indicate that moving through the process is the expectation.*

Your new member training is the opportunity to invite new people to join you on the journey. Use the time wisely. Ask for commitment. Challenge your potential members to bring others through the ministry process.

Back to Jesus

If anyone knows discipleship, it is Jesus.

His method of discipleship was simple.

Jesus drew twelve men to Himself, trained them, and unleashed the movement of the gospel through them. In fact, you are reading this today because these men got serious about their calling. Jesus had no plan B. The disciples were the plan. He left the message in their hands.

Most people would have done it differently. Most people would have chosen another method to be sure people heard about his sacrifice. He did have every resource available to Him. After all, He is God.

He could have chosen to broadcast His death and resurrection to the entire world. He could have preached it loudly from the heavens. He could have had angels disperse gospel tracts from the cosmos.

Instead He simply poured Himself into His disciples.

Encountering Jesus and His disciples in the gospels provides a snapshot of a simple discipleship process. In the Gospel of Luke, three distinct phases emerge: calling, building, and sending. These three phases are sequential and are designed to move the disciples toward greater levels of commitment.

The Calling (Luke 5–6)

In Luke 5, Jesus calls the disciples to Himself. Jesus provided them with opportunities to encounter and experience Him. He interacted with them relationally and on their turf. He went fishing with Peter, James, and John. He went to a party at Matthew's house. And He asked each of them to follow Him.

In Luke 6, Jesus cemented their calling. After spending the night praying, He appointed twelve guys to be His apostles. They were now going to be recognized as His disciples, as belonging to Him.

The Building (Luke 7-8)

After calling the disciples to Himself, He provided them with opportunities designed to build their faith. In Luke 7, He exposed them to critical teaching. They learned about having an eternal view, rejoicing, loving enemies, not judging others, and bearing spiritual fruit.

In Luke 8, He allowed them to observe Him on the front lines of ministry. They saw Him heal people and raise the dead. They saw Him calm a storm. They also learned how to treat people by watching Jesus. They saw His love and compassion toward people who society shunned. He defended the worship of a repentant, sinful woman, and He referred to another woman as daughter.

The Sending (Luke 9)

After the calling and building phases, Jesus now turned ministry over to His disciples. He provided them opportunities to grow by serving. In Luke 9, Jesus sent out His disciples to do ministry together. They came back for debriefing. Perhaps Jesus sat around the campfire with His disciples and listened intently to their stories. It was a great teaching moment. Serving always is.

Later in Luke 9, Jesus invited the disciples to participate in the feeding of the five thousand. He said to them, "You give them something to eat." They passed out the baskets and participated in the miracle.

While Jesus sent them to do ministry, He still provided instruction and encouragement. Jesus rescued them from a ministry opportunity that did not quite go as planned. The disciples had tried to cast a demon out of a boy but could not. It was probably rather embarrassing. The father came to Jesus begging for help. Jesus stepped in and brought healing. Jesus intentionally placed them in a position to be spiritually stretched.

Jesus called, built, and sent His disciples. He strategically and sequentially placed them in a position to move to greater levels of commitment and growth.

His discipleship process was simple. It was not stagnant or congested.

It had movement.

Take the prescriptions. Be sure your church removes the congestion. Then your church will be ready to get everyone on the same page. We call that alignment, the subject of the next chapter.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What has been our view of spiritual growth? Does it match 2 Corinthians 3:13?*
- 2. Is our church congested? Where?*
- 3. Are our programs placed along a process?*
- 4. What is the sequence of our programming?*
- 5. Do we have a clear step for new believers?*
- 6. What should we do about our new members class or lack of one?¹*

¹ *Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, Simple Church (Nashville: B&H, 2011).*